



DEMONS AND PROTECTORS

FOLK RELIGION IN
TIBETAN AND MONGOLIAN
BUDDHISM

ZSÓKA GELLE

Masters of the Mani Mantra



According to the basic ideas of Buddhism, there is no greater honour than to spread the teachings of the Buddha and to indicate the path of enlightenment to those wandering in the darkness of ignorance. As the master of simple believers, the lama mani encourages listeners with his stories to live a virtuous existence, and reminds them of the Buddhist Law regulating everyday life. In order to multiply his merits, the lay practitioner offers a gift to the monastery, the lama, and the poor; he lights a devotional candle in front of statues of the deities, journeys to places of pilgrimage, walks round the holy objects, and asks the lamas for a blessing and an amulet. He strives to do good, in the knowledge of cause and effect, the law of the karma, the sufferings of rebirth in the six worlds (*srid pa'i 'khor lo*), the horrors of the underworld, and the judgment seat of the Lord of Death. He recites the mantras of various deities, or makes use of a prayer-wheel; among the mantras, that with the greatest cult is Chenrezi's (Avalokiteshvara) six-syllable mantra, the OM MANI PEME HUNG, which like all mantras aids meditation and the cleansing of the ego. The lama mani, who has received the Chenrezi initiation and is therefore the possessor of knowledge passed on from generation to generation, reinforces the importance of these actions in his listeners and explains the meaning of the six-syllable mantra.



Fig. 144: *Mani lama with tashi gomang of Buthan* (Photo: Mani Lama, Bhutan, 1998)

One portion of his stories concerns delogs ('*das log*), people who have been to the underworld and returned to earth to tell of the terrible sufferings there. The lama also tells Buddhist birth stories originating from India, which present the Buddha's previous rebirths as an example to the listener. During this presentation the lama turns a hand prayer-wheel and sings the six-syllable mantra at the end of each chapter. At these moments the audience sings along with him. He illustrates his performance with a *thangka*, a painted scroll, or a *tashi gomang*. The *tashi gomang* is a square cabinet built onto a wooden structure approximately sixty centimeters high. Small doors open all around, and behind the doors are small statues of deities. The lama mani uses these statues and relief pictures to illustrate his story (fig. 144).

The recitation of the OM MANI PEME HUNG is today, in the modern age, the practice of the masses, but in the past it was merely the function of the *manipa*, who following their initiation were authorized to recite this mantra; people today still believe in the special effects engendered by the wonderful melodies of the mantras sung in various ways (*mani dbyangs*) by the initiated. Anyone can be a lama mani, regardless of gender, but most often it is secular wandering teachers, or monks and nuns from the kagyü and nyingma school, who spend their lives spreading the word of the Mani mantra. In Tibet the son traditionally inherits the occupation of the father, therefore the vocation of the lama mani usually remains within the family as an occupation inherited over generations. In their introductory ceremony this is how they profess their vocation:

'The white shell horn symbolizes that I belong to the lineage of the sons of Chenrezi. The spotless tradition lineage is the lineage of Ratnabhadra, the Faith is the untainted six-syllable mantra's wisdom, the Dharma is a clear and blooming water-lily. I am a humble pauper travelling the kingdom, a *lo chen* who understands his actions and their reasons. I am an elephant prod, who prompts the believers to follow the Dharma. I am the judge above the great sinners, I know the path.'¹

¹ *dung dkar lag tu 'khor ba 'di / nga Thugs rje chen po'i bu rgyud yin pa'i rtags / spyir rgyud pa ma nyams Ratnabhadra'i rgyud / gsungs ni ma nyams yi ge drug ma'i gsungs / chos ni ma nyams padma kha mched yin / nga rgyal kham bskor ba'i sprang po yin / las rgyu 'bras shod pa'i lo chen yin / dad can chos la skul ba'i lcags kyu yin / sdig chen gshags pa phul ba'i lam mkhan yin / RATNA1: 17r-v*



Fig. 145: Buchen Norgye delivering a lecture. He knows every story by heart, and telling just one of them may take a day or two (Photo: Zsóka Gelle, Kollegal, February 2000)

THE ORIGINS OF THE LAMA MANI TRADITION

Though the lama mani vocation subsists on the ancient Tibetan storytelling and song tradition, its first mention appears only in the 13th century, in the biography of the great saint, Guru Chöwang (*Guru Chos dbang*, 1212–1273). It is mentioned that the famous siddha wrote stories for the manipa (Stein, 1972: 268). Francoise Pommaret also backs up this idea by noting that the manipa and the Mani mantra recited by them became increasingly popular in the 13th century through Guru Chöwang, who is also famous for descending to the underworld to rescue his mother. This is of further interest because in the literature of the Avalokiteshvara-cult, the manipas appear as the rescuers of the dead; in several texts – as for example in the Lingsa Chökyi, the Karma Wangdzin and the Sangye Chödrom – there are detailed accounts of a delog, walking in the underworld, meeting a manipa who is engaged in rescuing human beings (Pommaret, 1997: 504; Epstein, 1982: 26). Guru Chöwang, therefore, unified the traditions of the siddhas, manipas, and delogs, and encouraged the manipas through his songs to present the Mani mantra in the marketplaces, so that even simple people could have access to liberation.

There are traditions that connect the origin of the lama manis to Thangtong Gyalpo (1361–1485). One biography states that several manipa were his students; when one of them requested a teaching that would illuminate the true nature of mind, Thangtong responded by a statement of authorization (*bka' lung*), which contained the basic principles of Buddhism and has been a part of the manipas' introductory prayers ever since. (Gyurme: 293, 326) This tradition is continued by the story of the life of the first lama mani, and the genesis of the lama manis, which is also part of their introductory ritual. According to the story, Ratnabhadra – originally called Rinchen Sangpo – was the emanation of Chenrezi, and received the initiation and teachings needed to become a lama mani from Thangtong Gyalpo (RATNA1: 8r-9v):

'Thangtong Gyalpo cut Rinchen Sangpo's hair, transformed his countenance, and took away his name. When taking the monastic vow Ratnabhadra received from him the name *lo chen*. He was also given the initiation of the Greatly Merciful yidam, the precept and the practical instructions, as well as the consecration practice of Aryapalo. This is how the lineage of the *lo chens* began, which is like the river whose source leads to the snow. OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI. He also told him the most important teachings of the Jina and his life stories, which were followed by liberation stories. The lama of the Chubori iron bridge spoke thus:

Among the ten chapters of the father-tantra biographies, the most important are the ones about the high lamas, that of the Dharma king Jigten Wangchug, and that of the Dharma king Drime Kunden; among the seven chapters of the mother-tantra, the history of Sukyi Nyima Brahmin-woman is the most important; among the twenty-one delog histories, that of Delog Lingsa Chökyi is the most important. But this is not all. In addition to these I will provide a few more liberation stories. Oh, wise Ratnabhadra, head of the *lo chens*! Continue your meditation in the Medicinal Golden Arbour Grove.²

² Grub thob Thang stong rGyal pos kyang Rin chen bZang po'i skra bcad lus bsgyur ming spos / dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa gngang nas mtshan yang Lo chen Ratnabhadra zhes bya bar mtshan gsol lo / yi dam thugs rje chen po'i dbang lung man ngag dang bcas pa gngang / gzhas yang sPyan ras gzigs Arya pa lo'i rab gnas gngang te lo chen gyi rgyud pa chu 'go gangs la thug pa lta bu de nas byung pa yin no / OM MANI PADME HUM HRI / gzhan yang rgyal ba gong ma'i bka' dang lo rgyus thams cad zhal phye nas / da yang de'i tshe de'i dus nas / rnam thar gyi skor mdzad nas / lcags zam Chu bo ri'i bla ma grub thob Thang stong rGyal po'i zhal nas / snga dro dus kyi tshe / bla ma gong ma nams dang khyad par chos rgyal 'jig rten dbang phyug dang / chos rgyal Dri med Kun ldan gyis gtso byas pho rgyud kyi enam thar le'u bcu tsam dang / bram ze ma gZugs kyi Nyi ma'i rnam thar gtsobyas mo rgyud le'u bdun tsam dang 'das log gLing bza' Chos skyid gtso byas pas / 'das log mam grangs nyi shu rtsa gcig gsungs nas khyab mchis / 'o na kyang rnam thar chos tshan nyung ba gcig gngang nas 'di skad ches gsungs so / lo chen gyi gtso bo Ratnabhadra khyod rang byang / sMan sdling gser gyi ldum ra de ru sgom shog gcig ces gsungs pas / RATNA1: 8r-9v.

THE IMPLEMENTS OF THE LAMA MANI

The lama manis are, for the most part, travelling teachers. During their travels they carry a large backpack, which is filled with books, painted scrolls, altar accessories, and food. They usually take along with them one escort, who helps them with their load. They most often recite their stories for the inhabitants of villages and visitors to places of pilgrimage on auspicious days and holidays of the Tibetan calendar. Before the performance they build a simple altar on which they place a shell-horn, vajra, rice-mandala offering, and holy pictures. They fasten the *thangka* used to illustrate their story above the altar. The teaching opens with preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*), which – according to tradition – begin with taking refuge and the development of the bodhicitta, continue with mandala offering, prayers to Chenrezi, and the recitation of the task of the lama mani, finishing with the offering of merits. The lama manis usually wear a short-sleeved red shirt or a brown robe; they hold a mala and a text in one hand and an iron lance in the other. They wear a red cloak-like headdress, which has long tassels hanging from the back. During the performance of the story they use only their iron lance, with which they point to the

Fig. 147: The iron spear of Buchen Gyurme
(Photo: Zsóka Gelle, Dekyiling, 2001)



Fig. 146: Buchen Gyurme, who now lives in Dekyiling, North India, is one of the last mani lamas still active
(Photo: Zsóka Gelle, Dekyiling, 1998)

thangka to show which part of the story they are speaking about. (Oral 1) (fig. 146)

The biography of Ratnabhadra describes the countenance of the lama mani in the following terms: 'Ratnabhadra, Chenrezi's emanation, the wise lama, formed a protective mudra with his right hand, and held the *Maṇi bka'* 'bum in his left. On his head he wore a floating hat, signifying the level of his realization; his body was cloaked in a trellised cloth of monks...'³

One of the most important implements of the lama manis is a metal stick (*lcags mdung*, its literal meaning being iron lance), with which they point to certain parts of the picture, so that the listeners can more easily follow the long stories and adventures that flow one into another. Many small objects are tied to the iron lance; their importance is explained thus by Buchen Norgye: 'The sound of the little bells on the iron lance is the voice of the dakinis. The chain is to pull out all those who are suffering in the underworld. The mirror shows the world. This piece of linen is the flag of the dakinis. This other is the cloak of the dakinis.' (Oral 2) We may find a detailed account in Ratnabhadra's life history:

'OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI. The iron lance in my hand signifies the introduction to the liberation story. It is an offering to please the father-lama. On the tip [of the lance] the '*khyong go* shakes one up from the deep of samsara, and the knot in the middle is the symbol of the holy doctrine woven into the heart. On the bottom, the vajra symbolizes the wrathful scarlet-black Hayagriva, and the ring on the holder symbolizes the eternal samaya. The attached chain symbolizes the stairway to the heavens. The separate bracelet symbolizes the rule of the marketplace. The half-circle healing stone is the base of the father-lama's seat. The three separate knots on it symbolize the three pure bodies, the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya and the nirmanakaya. The awl on its tip is the

³ *Sprul pa'i lo chen Ratnabhadra de / phyag g-yas skyabs byin gyi phyag rgya mdzad / phyag g.yon Maṇi bka' 'bum bsnams / dbu la dbang lding gi lding zhwa gsol / sku la chos gos dra mig gsol RATNA1: 9v.*



Fig. 148: Buchen Norgye and his wife, Pasang Dolma, who also used to be a mani lama when she was young (Photo: Zsóka Gelle, Kollegal, 2000)

introduction performed in the marketplace. The five-pointed diadem fastened onto this is the meeting of the mother-dakinis belonging to the five groups. The little bell tied to it symbolizes that fame spreads in ten directions. The ring on this symbolizes the reign over the three worlds. The little ring tied to this symbolizes the circumambulation of the kingdom in a ring-form. The sign of the Sun and the Moon on it cleanses the four continents from defilements. The mirror on this is the symbol of purifying one from ignorance. The little bell shows that the voice of the glorious Dharma resounds [to far-away lands]. The *a lig rtsi lig* tied to it symbolizes the great faith in the Dharma. The tiger skin tied onto the right side symbolizes the pure right-side hero. The yellow leopard skin symbolizes the pure left-hand heroine *Sprang*. This was the explanation of my iron lance.⁴

Another important implement is the conch-shell, which rests on the altar during the ceremony. The aforementioned Tibetan text speaks about this in the following way: 'The conch-shell of the Dharma was born from the deep of the ocean. A precept is connected to the appearance of the Dharma's conch-shell. The nice temple's Dharma-conch-shell is the sweet voice of the precious lamas, the sign of the Dharma-friend nobles, the messenger of *Lo chen bdag*, the voice of Lama Chenrezi, that encourages the crowd in the marketplace to live in virtue. OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI'⁵

The general characteristic of the lama mani's *thangka* is that the main figure is seen in the middle of the displayed picture, and the story is 'read' around the main figure, clockwise from the top right. These pictures are to help the lama mani illustrate his stories during his travels;

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⁵ chos dung 'khrungs pa rgya mtsho'i rting nas 'khrungs / chos dung byon pa la lung bar nas byon / lha khang bzang po gcig gi chos dung yin / bla ma rin po che'i snyan gsan yin / ban btsun chos grogs rnams kyi brda gtong yin / sprang lo chen bdag gi bang chen yin / khrom mi mang rnams kyi dge bskul yin / bla ma sPyan ras gzigs kyi gsungs skad yig / OM MANI PADME HUM HRI / RATNA1: 17r.

they are not used on any other occasion. The structure of the picture is in accordance with the structure of the thangka illustrating the past lives of the Buddha; the main figure is located a little way above the centre of the composition. Such pictures and similar are called 'biographical' or *mam thar thang kas* in the literature of iconography. These belong to the group of narrative thangkas, since they – unlike the Buddha depictions beyond space and time – present several scenes, placing the characters shown in some legendary or historical past setting (Jackson, 1984: 26). The scenes generally present a simple, realistic environment, in which mountains, valleys, rivers, cliffs, and lakes seek to trigger the effect of a three-dimensional space in the eyes of the audience. One setting flows smoothly into the next with no space in between, and the lively gestures, poses, and attire all conform to the rules of Tibetan painting. The architectural elements are simple and undecorated, serving as signs. Gates, walls, and roofs blend into the environment, and serve only to mark the locations.

In ancient India there were already examples of similar scroll pictures painted onto linen (S.: *pata*, *patagata*, *patacitra*). These could fulfill several different functions: they were hung on walls, or carried around in parades, and many of them were created to illustrate stories. In such cases, the given illustrated section was raised during the recitation. Similar narrative paintings were used by those leaders who belonged to a religious community living in a place of pilgrimage; their job was to tell the pilgrims stories of the miracles and teachings of the saints who once lived there.

The travelling storytellers of India also used such pictures to illustrate their stories. Literary works justify their existence, and we can find references to them, as for example in the *Mudrarakshasa*,⁶ where the pictures are called *yamapata*. These travelling storytellers were called *mankhas* or *shaubhikas* in ancient India. The Jains were also familiar with this occupation, if the theory holds true that Goshala Mankhaliputta's father, who was a contemporary of Buddha, though slightly older, was also a *mankha* (Tucci, 1949: 270). The court poet of Emperor Harsha, Bana, also speaks of such a picture in his work entitled *Harshacharita* (the Acts of Harsha) (Agrawala,



Fig. 149: The thangka of the delog story entitles *Kun dga' rang sgrol*, in the centre – in a manner similar to that in the picture mentioned in the text – Yama, the Lord of the Dead. Property of Buchen Gyurme (Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2001)

1969: 114–115). In the story he mentions a popular storyteller who exhibited his *yamapata* in the marketplaces and open streets, depicting Yama, the Lord of Death, and the sufferings of the afterworld painted onto linen (fig. 149). He held the picture in his left hand and with his right pointed to the various parts of the picture, to emphasize certain sections of his story. It is important to note that according to the narration, such paintings existed in the time of Harsha (King of Magadha: 606–647 A.D.), since this makes it probable that the Palas, who inherited the greater part of Harsha's 7th century empire, continued the artistic tradition (Huntington, 1991: 99); in this case, we

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was they who familiarized the Tibetans with this tradition. (Although it deals with the Tibetan tradition in only one page, for more information on the Indian origins of the pictorial storytellers and the spreading of the tradition see Mair, 1988: ix–278.)

Three Tibetan thangkas will now be presented. The first thangka belongs to Buchen Gyurme, who lives in exile in India, but who is still an active practitioner of the lama mani tradition. The picture is the modern copy of an older picture originating from Tibet (fig. 150). It depicts the story of Pema Öbar, which tells of one of the previous lives of Padmasambhava, the famous 8th-century guru. The source of the story can be found in the *Padma bka' thang*, one of the several biographies of Padmasambhava, which Urgyen Lingpa, the famous tertön, found in 1326 in Yarlung, in the Crystal Cliff Cave. According to the story there were two men in the Mutik Ser Empire: a wicked king called Lonpe Chöge and his cunning minister

Fig. 150: *The thangka of Pema Öbar, property of Buchen Norgye*
(Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2000)



Quickfoot. Also living in this kingdom was a clever merchant, Norsang, whom the king did not like, so he decided to send him on a dangerous trip to the endless ocean to acquire the wish-granting stone from the Queen of the Nagas. Norsang raised the question of his old age as an excuse, but the king said that if Norsang did not go his wife would be put to death. Starting off on the journey to the Nagas, the emanation of the guards of the precious stone, an enormous scorpion attacked Norsang's boat and destroyed it along with all the passengers. Six months later, Guru Padmasambhava, who happened to be investigating the ten segments of the universe, saw Norsang's wife, who had given up all hope regarding the return of her husband, and was mourning at home. The guru watched her with sympathy and sent a ray of light from his body into the body of the woman, resulting in the birth of Pema Öbar, the Lotus Flower of the Ray of Light, nine months and ten days later. The little boy was born with

wonderful abilities, but did not know anything of his father, Norsang, for his mother thought it best to remain silent about the truth. Then one day, when his mother was praying, he stole a piece of wool and made eighteen threads from it. He took it to the market where he intended to trade them for shells. It turned out that the old woman selling shells had known his father, so he gave her his threads as recompense for the learning of truth. The boy returned home with a heavy heart. The king was observing his kingdom from the top of his palace with a looking glass when he saw the wonderfully gleaming threads in the old woman's possession. He sent out Quickfoot to find out where the thread came from. Threatened by the minister, the woman told him that the thread had come from Norsang's three-year-old son. The minister rushed to Norsang's house so as to take the child to the king, but his mother hid him. When the minister wanted to kill the woman, Pema Öbar emerged and said he would do anything the king wished. The king's order was the same as for his father: bring back the wish-granting stone from the Queen of the Nagas. Before the journey, the mother and her three-year-old son first went to the local stupa, and the mother prayed to the dakinis for the safe return of her son. The dakinis appeared and taught the boy a magic spell that would protect him from all harm. The giant scorpion once again appeared on the ocean, but the mantra protected the boy. After this, he descended into the underwater empire of the Nagas, where he had to get past the guards, but once again the protecting mantra helped him. The Queen of the

Nagas welcomed the miraculous boy and gave him the wish-granting precious stone, but warned him that the stone may only be used to serve Buddhist teachings, and cannot be used to grant vain wishes. Pema Öbar returned home. His mother hid him again, but Quickfoot found him in the house and took him before the king. They wanted to punish him for returning home and not giving the precious stone to the king, so they decided to send him to the land of the demons to bring back the enchanted skillet, with which one could fly through the air. The boy embarked on the journey, but the road was so long that he considered throwing himself off a cliff. But then a white bird warned him that if he killed himself he would not be reborn in human form for five thousand years. When he arrived in the land of the demons, the four demon guards ate him up, but as soon as he recited the secret mantra, they spat him out whole. The demon queen welcomed the surprise dinner and likewise devoured him, but the same happened as with her guards. From this point on, the boy became their guru, and the queen gave him the enchanted skillet and the drumsticks. Pema Öbar turned them into fairies and, seated in the enchanted skillet, they returned together to the palace of the evil king. The king chased away the fairies, claiming that no one was allowed to have five wives, and decided that Pema Öbar should be burnt at the stake, so as to be free of him once and for all. When the boy once again recited the mantra, the stake failed to catch fire. But his executioners begged him not to do this, because the king would have them put to death if they did not follow his orders. So Pema Öbar lit his own fire and was burned; all that remained of him was his hat. His ashes were scattered in four directions. The dakinis suggested that perhaps the king and his minister should fly around a little in their enchanted skillet. The enchanted skillet flew away with the two evil men, and landed in the kingdom of the demons where the demon children ate the king and his minister. The dakinis went up to the top of the mountain, and, reciting the mantras, gathered up the ashes of Pema Öbar, placed them in a bag and threw it into the ocean. In the place where the ashes fell into the water, there grew a lotus flower, and in the middle lay a small boy. He was Guru Padmasambhava, who was born of a lotus flower, and who was taken to the king's palace by the dakinis and was enthroned.

The next thangka relates the story of Dakini Dova Szangmo (fig. 151), which ushers us into the world of a



Fig. 151: *The thangka of Dova Szangmo*, property of Buchen Gyurme
(Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2001)

very popular old Tibetan story; though this story also takes place in the land of fairies, it is based on history. To this day the Mon ethnic group living in north-eastern Nepal preserves the memory of King Kala Wangpo of the story, as well as the ruins of his supposed palace. In the country of King Kala Wangpo there was no religion, and the people were constantly fighting each other. The wisdom dakini, Jeshe Kandoma, saw their sufferings and decided to descend to earth to help them. She was born as the daughter of elderly parents in the wilderness. The king of the country had a wicked wife who had a servant; the queen and her servant held the king in their control. One day the king's dog disappeared, and following the dog's tracks, the king happened upon a house made of wood, in which he found a beautiful girl. He fell in love with her immediately and asked her parents to allow the girl, Dova Sangmo, to wed him. The parents feared the king's power, so did not dare to refuse the request. Dova

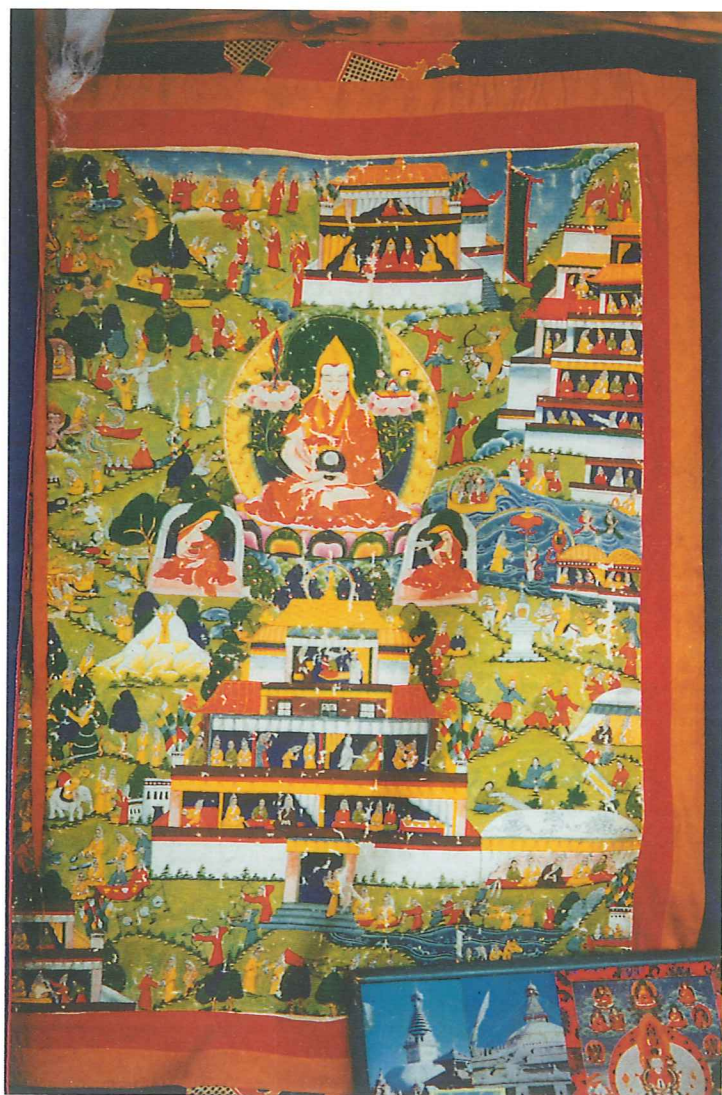
Sangmo was at first reluctant to leave, but she lived happily in her first years at the king's court. She gave birth to a daughter and later a son. The wicked queen and her servant could not bear to watch the happiness of the beautiful dakini and the king, so they poisoned the king and threw him into prison. Leaving her children vulnerable, Dova Sangmo fled in fright and went to the land of dakinis. The wicked queen pretended to be ill and said that the only remedy would be to eat the hearts of the two children. The two butchers whom she had hired to kill the children were won over by the children's pleas for mercy, and they gave the queen the hearts of two puppies instead; she recovered immediately. But the wicked queen discovered the two siblings playing in the courtyard and grew enraged. She hired two hard-hearted fishermen to throw them into the ocean. But the fishermen were also swayed by the helpless children, and aban-

doned them in the woods instead. Dova Sangmo watched her children from the land of dakinis, and helped them on their way in the form of different animals. But the queen found out once again that the children were still alive, so she had them captured and brought to her palace. She wanted to have them thrown into a deep dark pit, but one of the executioners let the girl go. The little boy, however, was thrown into the pit; Dova Sangmo turned herself into two eagles and caught the falling boy on her wings, and flew away with him above the ocean. There she dropped him into the water and turned herself into two fish. The fish took the boy to shore. The people of Pemachen, the country on the shore of the ocean, happily welcomed the young prince and chose him as their king. The little girl, seeing her brother plummeting into the pit, had wanted to cast herself into the deep too, but her 'executioner' suggested that instead she should go to Pemachen, where the

people would take care of her. After a long and perilous journey, the girl arrived in Pemachen and was reunited with her brother. The wicked queen attacked Pemachen, but the first arrow of the son of Dova Sangmo pierced her heart. The boy then returned to his own country and freed his father from his cell. All returned to Pemachen and lived there happily.

The thangka of the next picture was probably painted at the beginning of the 1970's by the son of Buchen Norgye, Norbu Sangpo, who died very young in south India (fig. 152). The story is from the work entitled *Bka' gdams pa chos bu chos*, which tells of the former lives of the 11th century Indian master Atisha, from whom originates the second wave of the spread of Buddhism. According to the story, Döndup, who was regarded as the reincarnation of Avalokiteshvara, was born as the son of the royal family. His mother the queen died when he was five years old, and so the king had to choose a new wife. He fell in love with a poor girl, whom he married, and she bore him another son, called Dönyö. The two brothers loved each other, but the new queen wished to see her own son sitting on the throne rather than the king's first-born heir, Döndup, and this led her to do a wicked deed. She told the king that she was very ill and that the cause of this illness was Döndup, claiming that he was the incarnation of a demon and that he had caused the death of his own mother, for which he must be banished. But the two brothers would not be separated, and they journeyed into the wilderness together. Dönyö died during the tiring trip and the heartbroken Döndup found shelter under a hermit's roof. Terrible

Fig. 152: The thangka of Dönyö Döndup, property of Buchen Norgye (Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2000)



plagues afflicted the country where Döndup settled, and so the court magician suggested to the king that they make a sacrifice to the Nagas of a boy who had been born in the year of the dragon. Döndup was chosen; he arrived at the underwater kingdom of the Nagas unharmed. He taught the Naga king Buddhist philosophy and in return the king used his magical powers to transport the boy back to the house of the hermit. The hermit and Döndup went to the king. The king's daughter fell in love with Döndup, so the king made him his heir, while he and the hermit retired to the mountains to meditate. Döndup met his brother Dönyö while walking in the forest. The gods had felt pity for Dönyö and had revived him with their magic potions. The two brothers returned happily to their home, where their parents received them in shame. Dönyö happily ruled his father's land, while Döndup ruled in his new kingdom.

According to the Tibetans, the tale is not only an example of brotherly love, but also contains political and religious significance. The half-brothers symbolize the connection between the Dalai Lama (the lord of the Ü Province) and the Panchen Lama (the lord of the Tsang Province) who lived as loving brothers until the wicked

minister of the Dalai Lama, who betrayed both of his masters, summoned Gushri Khan from Mongolia in 1642, to make the Dalai Lama the religious and political leader of Tibet.

The thangka of the lama manis usually disintegrate over time through constant use and travel. Since the primary use of the pictures is to illustrate the stories of the lama manis and so help the audience understand what is being said, it is important that they be always in good condition; therefore, if a picture can no longer be used, an exact duplicate is made. The lama mani usually only performs four or five stories; the first series of these illustrative pictures is given to him by his master, his father, at his first performance, at around age 13. Over the course of twenty or thirty years, when the base on the canvas begins to flake, the lama repaints his pictures and passes it on to his descendant.

The traditions of the lama manis as passed on from father to son are slowly dying out. The modern way of life and the spread of the entertainment industry are pushing them into the background, until finally the masters of the Mani mantra will disappear from the colourful bustle of the marketplace forever.

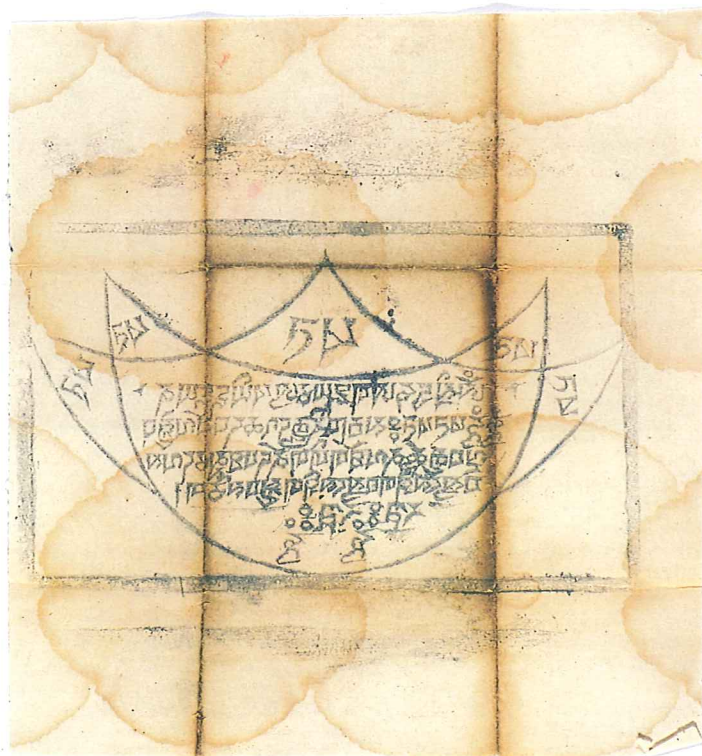


Fig. 153: Amulet protecting from lightning
Mongolia, 20th century. Cat.: 30